



Building toward the Future

Gen Edward A. Rice Jr., USAF

Common wisdom asserts the existence of an ancient Chinese curse that translates, “May you live in interesting times.” In keeping with the Chinese theme of wisdom that we all “know,” it is often said that the Chinese characters for *crisis* and *opportunity* are identical. The well-informed readers of *Air and Space Power Journal* (*ASPJ*) know that both of these memes have long histories but no basis in truth. However, that fact does not preclude them from being incredibly appropriate for the situation in which we find ourselves. Certainly, we are living in interesting times, and although numerous challenges face the Air Force today, we have a unique opportunity to shape our future. As the first online-only issue of *ASPJ* launches in January 2012, the Air Force—indeed, the entire nation—must deal with a period of fiscal austerity. Although not unprecedented, such circumstances are new to many Air Force people who have served during a time when resources were relatively abundant. As we move forward, we must remain undaunted by such issues and embrace the opportunities that present themselves, building our way to the Air Force of tomorrow.

The Challenges of Interesting Times

No one can read current events without coming face-to-face with many of the dilemmas that confront the Air Force today. The nation’s financial crisis has become a major driver as the Department of Defense (DOD) and Air Force must deal with fiscal realities dictated by the budget crunch. The \$450 billion cut across the DOD budget, mandated by the Budget Control Act of 2011, forced Air Force leaders to examine carefully each and every dollar spent and not only cut excess spending but also evaluate all missions and functions to determine where the service could take risk.¹ Currently, the Air Force uses various force-shaping tools to arrive at our authorized end strength of active duty members;

Report Documentation Page			<i>Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188</i>	
<p>Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.</p>				
1. REPORT DATE FEB 2012	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2012 to 00-00-2012		
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Building toward the Future		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER		
		5b. GRANT NUMBER		
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER		
6. AUTHOR(S)		5d. PROJECT NUMBER		
		5e. TASK NUMBER		
		5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER		
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Air Force Research Institute (AFRI),Air & Space Power Journal,155 N. Twining Street,Maxwell AFB,AL,36112		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER		
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)		10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)		
		11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)		
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited				
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES				
14. ABSTRACT				
15. SUBJECT TERMS				
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 4
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON	



additionally, it has implemented tools for managing the civilian force in order to return to the levels of manning in fiscal year 2010. The looming effects of the sequestration, triggered when the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction failed to arrive at an agreement to reduce the deficit by the required \$1.5 trillion, create more uncertainty regarding manning and funding levels for the future.

These challenges, on top of the ongoing mandate to meet mission requirements to support the joint team in winning today's wars and to develop Airmen for tomorrow, point to an uncertain future. Despite the constraints on funding and manning, the Air Force remains the nation's go-to force, providing global vigilance, reach, and power to exert national strength anywhere, and offering the nation immediate options for action. In short, the United States depends upon the efficient, imaginative, and effective use of air, space, and cyber power to maintain a leading national advantage to help overcome uncertainty.

Seizing the Opportunity

We may not know what the future looks like, but we do know that we cannot get there simply by continuing to do what we have always done. We must not look to the past as a blueprint for the future. As the Air Force moves into leaner fiscal times, I believe that we will receive the resources necessary to carry out our mission, albeit we will not receive any extra resources. The most important part of the new fiscal reality, however, is that we will not have at our disposal enough resources to conduct our mission in the same way we have in the past. Truly, this situation presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity for the Air Force to capitalize on new technology and processes that can fundamentally alter the way we do business. We cannot implement this essential shift merely by trimming "around the edges" and making incremental cuts in the way we operate now in order to fit into our new funding structure. Instead, we must envision the Air Force of tomorrow and build toward that future in a manner that takes full advantage of the many technological and procedural advancements that began as "good ideas" in the



pages of *ASPJ* and its predecessors. We must identify those areas that lie at the core of our mission and determine new means of attaining those goals. Our Air Force owes its existence to visionaries who sought innovative ways to do things—instead of going through an enemy’s line, let’s go over it. Now is the time to boldly embrace the enterprising spirit that Airmen have long demonstrated by harnessing the latest technology and developing novel ways of accomplishing the nation’s missions.

Building toward the Future

It is entirely fitting and appropriate that this particular article appear in the very first online-only edition of *Air and Space Power Journal*. This worthy initiative highlights the process of turning challenges into opportunities. *ASPJ* is charged with providing a forum in which professional Airmen can make significant contributions to scholarly thought concerning the exploitation of airpower and the development of forces dedicated to this pursuit—a responsibility it has discharged in print for more than 60 years. However, the new fiscal environment made continued production in that format impossible, a reality codified by a recent executive order to reduce spending on such activities as printing.² Faced with a new financial constraint, the *ASPJ* staff and Air University devised a way to transition quickly to the digital realm, preserving the ability to meet their mission charge. The new version of *ASPJ*, which retains all the attributes of the original, will serve as a platform for Airmen to advance the dialogue on air, space, and cyber operations. Further, the *Journal* does not lose portability since Airmen can view it on e-readers. As we build to the future, the online incarnation of *ASPJ* will undoubtedly grow and mature, incorporating new media and becoming interactive as well as carrying out and advancing the mission creatively. As this small example illustrates, Air Force leaders have a number of opportunities to determine smarter, more efficient, and effective ways of fulfilling our mission and leveraging new technologies and capabilities to improve our system of doing business. In this exciting time, I challenge leaders at all levels to embrace a culture of cost consciousness and seize the opportunity to build the Air Force of to-



morrow in a fresh, innovative manner. The nation and our joint partners depend upon the Air Force to maintain an advantage, overcome uncertainty, and always aim high . . . fly-fight-win. ☀

Notes

1. Budget Control Act of 2011, Public Law 112-25, S.365, 112th Cong., 1st sess., 2 August 2011, <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-112s365enr/pdf/BILLS-112s365enr.pdf>.
2. Executive Order 13589, Promoting Efficient Spending, 9 November 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/09/executive-order-13589-promoting-efficient-spending>.



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